

Equine Imagery in Early Modern Literature

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
with research distinction in English in the undergraduate colleges
of The Ohio State University

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Introduction

Early modern England relied heavily on horses for a wide variety of trades and pursuits. Horses plowed fields, transported people and goods across the country, carried knights in tournaments and battles, raced for the enjoyment of the upper classes, and even occasionally performed alongside human entertainers. They affected the lives of members of all social classes, but at the upper levels of society, they were status symbols and sources of entertainment, while the lower classes mainly used horses as working animals.

Authors took advantage of the necessity of horses in multiple ways. Some, including Gervase Markham, Thomas Blundeville, and Nicholas Morgan, published horsemanship manuals to share their knowledge and experience. Some of these manuals gave farmers practical advice on breeding and caring for their horses, while others catered to the gentry by providing instructions on training horses for racing, hunting, or manège, the precursor to modern dressage. These manuals were extremely popular; *Markham's master-piece* alone was reprinted more than ten times.

Authors who wrote for literary and polemical purposes also referred frequently to horses. In some cases, horses play a large part in the action of a narrative, but in others they remain purely metaphorical. The symbolic meanings associated with horses in literature are as varied as their roles their literal counterparts filled. Equine symbolism typically relates to status, control, or sexuality. Equestrian prowess was one of the marks of a gentleman, and the ability to control a powerful horse reflected one's ability to rule other people. Depending on the context, a rider's authority can either be affirmed or attacked. Equestrian images that focus on control usually emphasize a bridle or bit as the source of control. In some cases, the relationship between horse and rider represents reason bridling passion, but the horse can be a metaphor for a person instead.

The symbolism of power and control sometimes takes on a sexual meaning. Women are frequently associated with horses, and men supposedly have mastery over both. However, when the social hierarchy is inverted, men are described as horses, while women as riders gain both sexual and social power over them.

Equine imagery exists in many different genres. Religious polemic contains a wealth of references to horses, and the versatility of equine imagery allows both Protestant and Catholic authors to design their own symbols in addition to twisting and reinterpreting the opposing side's symbolism. In both martyr narratives and argumentative tracts, horses and other equines become symbols of power and authority. Descriptions of the pope riding on horseback emphasize his powerful status, but Protestant texts label his display a sign of pride instead of legitimate authority. Protestant polemicists frequently contrast images of the pope on horseback with descriptions or illustrations of Christ riding a humble ass. Even asses carry multiple meanings. They may be associated with Christ, but they are also used to symbolize foolishness and vice. Authors of both faiths choose which association to emphasize based on the messages they hope to send.

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* also makes frequent references to horses and asses. In this poem, equestrian prowess is a mark of an ideal knight. Because of the poem's emphasis on virtue, several scholars have claimed that a knight's ability to control his horse represents his reason's ability to rein in his passion. This theory applies to some events in *The Faerie Queene*, but it does not hold up in most of the prominent equestrian episodes. Horses can function as extensions of their riders and can even exhibit their own intuitive form of reason. The numerous references to horses naturally produce a variety of connotations, and an attempt to assign one meaning consistently is futile.

Equine imagery appears in drama as well as polemic and poetry. The city comedies *Eastward Ho* by George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and James Marston, *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, and *The Woman's Prize* by John Fletcher use bawdy equestrian metaphors to discuss gendered power struggle. *Eastward Ho* upholds the traditional social hierarchy by describing women as horses to be bridled and checked. Unruly women are punished, while those who submit to male rule are rewarded. *The Roaring Girl's* Moll Cutpurse challenges the association of women with horses by describing herself as both horse and rider. The flexibility of her imagery reflects the slippery, undefined nature of her character; she crosses the boundary between horse and rider just like she crosses gender barriers. In *The Woman's Prize*, women thoroughly trounce men in the battle of the sexes. Men may use bawdy equestrian humor, but women ultimately assert their status as riders with power over their male horses.

No matter what the genre, the flexibility of equine imagery allows authors to use the same animal to depict many different points. Whether affirming or attacking authority, illustrating virtue or vice, or promoting male or female supremacy, equine symbolism makes important contributions to these texts. Horses' pervasiveness in literature is a reflection of their importance in society. Equine imagery is very flexible; no one meaning can be consistently assigned to it, but the horse's ability to symbolize so many different ideas makes it a favorite choice of authors.

Chapter 1

Equine Symbolism in Religious Texts and Illustrations

In the debate between Catholics and Protestants, members of both faiths used many different symbols to enforce their arguments. Imagery involving horses or other equines was a favorite choice of polemicists because of the pervasiveness of horses in early modern culture and their flexibility as symbols. In both Catholic and Protestant writings, horses, along with asses and mules, have many different virtues and meanings. They can carry out God's will when humans do not, or they may remain purely symbolic. An image of an equine can illustrate pride, humility, virtue, or vice, and a proponent of one faith can twist or adapt the opposing side's symbolism to promote his own cause. The significance of these animals is far from consistent, but their versatility is what makes them such useful symbols.

In several narratives, horses serve as instruments of miraculous justice or mercy. One such story is that of Edward Waterson, an English Catholic priest and martyr. Father Richard Holtby describes Waterson's martyrdom:

And being laid upon the hurdle, the horse was set forward, but having passed forth about half a dozen paces the horse stood still and would not for anything they could do go any further, though they struck and pulled him almost for the space of a quarter of an hour. Wherefore they were forced to take another horse... Then setting one upon the horse they drew forward the hurdle until they came within the space of forty foot of the place of execution, where the other horse also stayed and could go no further, though he were plunged until the ropes burst in sunder. (229)

Holtby's report implies that because of Waterson's holiness, the two horses refused to torment him by dragging him through the streets. To Holtby, this event provides proof, both of Waterson's piety and God's love for Catholics. This miraculous occurrence of divine intervention even caught the notice of a Protestant observer: "an heretic being present, considering that he was twice stayed in this sort, said that this would be noted of some for a monument" (229).

Waterson's martyrdom is not the only record of horses helping the Catholic cause. There are two accounts of horses throwing Protestant riders who were known persecutors of Catholics. In *The Lady Falkland: Her Life*, a judge condemns a Catholic priest to death and tries to hurry his execution. This hasty judge receives his punishment when he mounts his horse: "he was no sooner up, but his horse, at all other times most gentle (as those of judges commonly are), began to curvet, threw him off his back, casting his head against a stone, where his brains were dashed out" (185). *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses Regular of the Lateran, at St. Monica's in Louvain* tells a similar story. The notorious Topcliffe has imprisoned Jane Wiseman, a pious Catholic widow. When she sees him riding under her window, she throws holy water on him and his horse, and "no sooner had the holy water touched the horse, but presently it seems he could not endure his rider, for the horse began so to kick and fling that he never ceased till his master Topcliffe was flung to the ground" (84).

The four "Catholic" horses in these stories have significant biblical connections. By including horses in their accounts, the authors show that the persecution of Catholics is so contrary to the natural order that even the beasts rebel against it. Psalms 31:9 commands, "Doe not become as horse and mule, which haue no vnderstanding" (*Rheims Douai Bible*). From the perspective of the authors of the martyr narratives, even the horses, who lack reason, understand

God's will better than the humans who persecute Catholics do. These horses are following the important biblical example of Balaam's ass, an equine that recognizes God's will and acts against a rider who tries to disobey God. Balaam angers God, and God sends an angel to block his path and kill him. Balaam does not see the angel, but his ass does. The ass tries to avoid the angel and bashes Balaam's foot against a wall in the process. When the ass falls down before the angel, Balaam beats her for her disobedience. Finally, when the ass speaks, Balaam sees the angel and agrees to obey God's instructions (*Rheims Douai Bible*, Num. 22:19-40). Like Balaam's ass, Topcliffe's and the judge's horses carry out God's will by punishing their riders. The judge's fall is a final punishment, but Topcliffe's may be meant as a warning. Unfortunately, Topcliffe fails to learn his lesson and does not reconcile with God as Balaam does.

The horse does not always take such an active role; in many cases, it remains a purely metaphorical image. Both Catholics and Protestants used the image of a stalking-horse to accuse the other religion of intentionally misleading the gullible populace. Jeffrey Kacirk traces the history of the meaning of a stalking-horse in *Forgotten English*. In the fifteenth century, a stalking-horse was "a horse trained to graze as it slowly approached birds or other wild game. This clever camouflage often allowed its dismounted rider to come close enough to shoot his prey...from under the horse's belly or neck" (4-5). Kacirk also notes, "By the late sixteenth century, stalking-horse was used figuratively for a sneaky type of military maneuver, and by the early seventeenth century for an accomplice who, often unknowingly, assisted in underhanded ventures" (5). Each of these meanings carries connotations of deception. In *An answer to a Catholike English-man*, William Barlow writes, "Religion was made but the Stawking-horse to practice Treasons" (90). Whether Barlow used a "Stawking-horse" to denote a hunting aid, a

military maneuver, or an accomplice, his broader meaning is clear: Catholics are traitors, but they use their religion as a façade to distract authorities from their more malicious intentions.

Robert Parsons and Edward Coffin respond to Barlow's accusations by turning his own equine imagery against him in *A discussion of the ansvvere of M. VVilliam Barlovv, D. of Diuinity*. In the preface, Coffin claims, "But it delighteth M. Barlow like a blynd horse in the battaile, boldly to adventure vpon any thing, be it neuer so false, fond, or improbable" (par.16). Barlow uses horses to accuse Catholics of treason and underhandedness, while Coffin does not grant Barlow the intelligence necessary to carry out treasonous dealings. He characterizes Barlow as blind and foolish, not clever and evil. Parsons directly addresses Barlow's stalking-horse accusation in the main text: "But first he doth not proue, or euer shall be able, such demerit of treason to haue drawn on this rigour, but only by calumniation, which hath indeed been the persecutors stawking-horse, to deceive the simple, pretending one thing for another, thereby to oppresse the innocent" (202). In this rebuttal, Parsons claims that Catholics do not use religion as a stalking-horse to disguise their treason; rather, Protestants use false accusations of treason to justify their persecution of Catholics. Both Barlow and Parsons effectively use this longstanding equine image to illustrate the false, misleading nature of the religions they oppose.

Aside from disguising evil intentions, horses play an important metaphorical role as symbols of power and status. Riding on a horse naturally gives one power over people on foot. The added height is symbolic of high status; it makes the rider more visible to others and allows him both literally and figuratively to look down on those below him. Mastering a horse requires strength, intelligence, and dedication, and a man powerful enough to control an animal that weighs a thousand pounds could surely exercise the same power over other people.

Artists and authors frequently exploit this connection between horses and power in both illustrations and written accounts. In *A Relation of the King of Spaines Receiving in Valliodolid, and in the English Colledge of the fame towne*, Robert Parsons mentions that the Spanish prince, who usually rides in a coach, arrives at the English College on horseback, “wich was a particular fauour to the people extreme desyrus to see him” (17). The prince would be hidden in a coach, but he is very visible on horseback. By riding on a horse, he can both win his people’s favor and prove his masculine strength. Parsons observes that in spite of the prince’s youth, he is “all redy bothe in person and behaiour much more ma[n]lyke the[n] I could haue supposed” (18). The prince’s arrival on horseback surely influences Parsons’ opinion of him; he would not look nearly as brave or manly in a coach.

Images and descriptions of the pope also make use of the horse as a symbol of power and status. John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* uses this imagery to criticize the pride of popes and argue that they should not have power over emperors and kings. Foxe describes a papal procession: “The Emperour on [sic] foreleadinge his horse by the bridle on the right hande: And the Marques of Brandenburge Prince elector, likewise leading his horse on the left hande, the Pope him selfe riding in the myddest vpon his palfrey” (188). A corresponding woodcut titled *Emperors Preceding the Pope* appears in the second edition (see fig. 1). In this picture, the pope is the only one on a horse, which makes him the most powerful person present. The pope and his horse are both lavishly dressed, which further emphasizes their high status. Even the emperor shows his submission to the pope by leading the pope’s horse on foot. Other kings are allowed in the procession, but they too must walk. The few common people in the picture are kneeling, which illustrates their low status. Although this woodcut shows the pope’s power, it is not meant to affirm that power. Rather, it argues that it is unnatural for a pope to have such supremacy over

secular authority figures. It paints the pope as a tyrant rather than a leader worthy of honor.

Because of the flexibility of equine symbolism, Foxe is able to transform a Catholic symbol of dignity and honor into a symbol of reprehensible pride.



Figure 1 *Emperors Preceding the Pope*, from John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1570; vol.1, appendix); rpt. in John King, *Tudor Royal Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; 150).

Foxe also describes another horse-related incident that demonstrates the pope's tyranny. Pope Adrian IV chastises Emperor Frederick I for holding his left stirrup instead of his right (35). According to Foxe, Frederick "was persecuted almost to exco[m]munication" for his error (20). A woodcut called *Pope Adrian IV Chiding Frederick I* depicts the event (see fig. 2). Once again, the Pope is the only person on a horse, and both he and his horse are very richly appareled. The emperor, who is well dressed himself, looks plain in comparison. In this picture, Frederick kneels to hold Adrian's right stirrup, presumably to atone for initially holding the left. The pope's overwhelming, overbearing status is condemned again. Foxe uses this event to argue that

a pope should not have the power to disgrace an emperor, especially over something as trivial as a stirrup.



Figure 2 *Pope Adrian IV Chiding Frederick I*, from John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1570, vol. 1, appendix); rpt. in John King, *Tudor Royal Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; 150).

Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveler*, though not a religious text in general, also uses horses to satirize the pope and those attending him:

Saint Peter's Day...is a day of supreme solemnity in Rome when the Ambassador of Spain comes and presents a milk-white jennet to the Pope, that kneels down upon his own accord in token of obeisance and humility before him, and lets him stride on his back as easy as one strides over a block...not a clerk or sexton is absent; no, nor a mule nor a foot-cloth belonging to any cardinal but attends on the tail of the triumph. (177)

If this description appeared in a less satirical work, one might be tempted to interpret it as an illustration of a natural hierarchy in which both man and beast kneel before the pope. In this

context, however, Nashe's sarcastic tone and obvious exaggeration mark this passage as a critical interpretation of Catholic ceremony. The supposed symbol of holiness and obedience, the "milk-white jennet," becomes ridiculous when combined with every other horse and mule attending on "the tail of triumph."

Like horses, mules are status symbols frequently associated with the clergy and the aristocracy. According to John King, "The mule is a larger animal than a donkey, and it thus offers a gentle ride suitable for an aristocratic rider. It is a more costly animal to purchase and maintain because it is sterile and nonproductive" (166). In Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, Cardinal Wolsey uses mules to emphasize his importance. He enters London with 20 mules, each wearing red and apparently carrying treasure. The impressive show of pomp and riches becomes a "ridiculous spectacle" when the mules break free and cause a great commotion (1121). The mules dump the "treasure" they are carrying, which turns out to be nothing more than "pieces of meate...pieces of bread and rosted egges...horse shoes, and olde bootes" (1121). Conveniently for Foxe, the mules, which are supposed to indicate wealth and power, ironically shame the proud cardinal. Again, Foxe twists Catholic equine symbolism in a way that supports Protestantism.

Mules' biblical associations complicate their status. The *Rheims Douai Bible* says, "Keepe ye my lawes. Thou shalt not make thy cattel to gender with the beasts of an other kinde" (Lev. 19:19). A marginal gloss for the verse states, "These diuersities are not prohibited for them selues...but schisme, and al participation with heretikes, and other infidels is forbid." This passage is worded similarly in the *Geneva Bible*, but the gloss is very different: "As a horse to leape an asse, or a mule a mare." If a mule, a cross between a horse and a donkey, is considered an abomination in a Protestant Bible, it is no wonder that Protestants like Foxe mocked Catholic

clergy for their use of mules. The irony of a supposedly pious priest riding a forbidden beast invites satire from Protestant polemicists.

Catholic authors also exploited the connotations associated with mules and mares. Discussing teenage Anne Boleyn, Nicholas Sander writes that at the French court, “she was called the English mare because of her shameless behavior, and then the royal mule, when she became acquainted with the king of France. She embraced the heresy of Luther to make her life and her opinions consistent” (403). By calling Anne a mare, Sander mocks her promiscuity. He then cements this image by comparing her to another equine: the mule. Sander intentionally mentions “the heresy of Luther” directly after this comparison; the juxtaposition associates Protestantism with promiscuity. Sander repeats his equine imagery in his discussion of Anne’s marriage to King Henry VIII: “The news was carried over into France, and there it became a common report that the king of England was going to marry the mule of the king of France” (403). Depicting Anne as a king’s mount both ridicules her for her sexuality and lowers her status to that of a beast of burden. This association also evokes undertones of bestiality, allowing the metaphor’s derisive effect to attack the kings’ reprehensible sexual practices as well.

A rider’s mount could shame him in many other ways. Several narratives include descriptions of martyrs being placed on undesirable steeds or riding in an ignominious manner. In *The English Roman Life*, Anthony Munday notes that the Protestant martyr Richard Atkins is “set upon an ass without any saddle” to be carried to the place of his execution (102). A woodcut of this stage of his martyrdom illustrates his humiliating passage (see fig. 3). By forcing Atkins to ride bareback, his tormentors rob him of the dignity that a mount would normally give him. They themselves must walk next to him, and they want to ensure that Atkins’ steed does not appear to raise his status above their own.

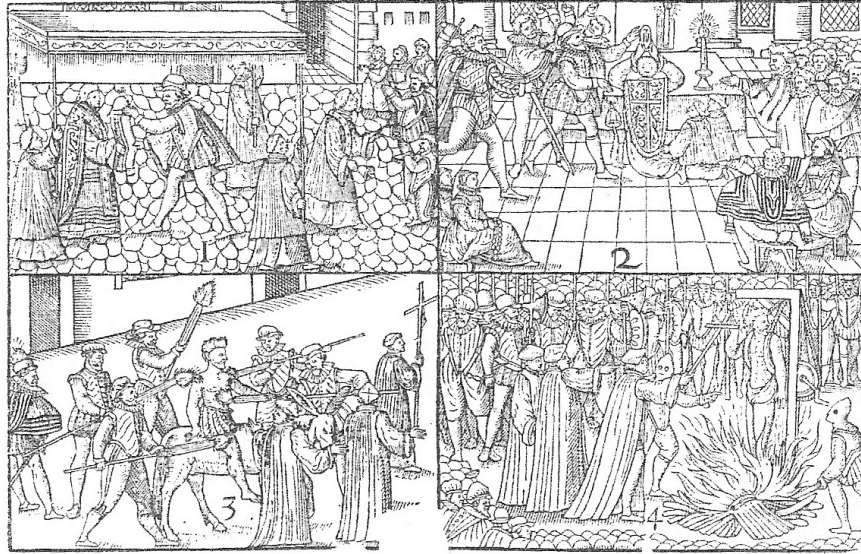


Figure 3 *The true and perfect manner of the execution of one Richard Atkins, Englishman at Rome*, from Anthony Munday, *The English Roman Life*, Ed. Philip J. Ayres. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980; 105).

Powerful persecutors use horses and asses in several other ways to shame martyrs.

William Gardiner, a martyr in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, rides to his execution with his arms tied behind his back and his feet tied under the horse's stomach (878). In the woodcut *The Description of Windsore Castle*, two martyrs are shown riding backwards on horses (see fig. 4). Foxe also tells the story of Doctor Ridley, who preaches a sermon on the inherent evils of Mary Tudor's reign before she inherits the throne. Unfortunately for Ridley, when Mary becomes queen, he must salute her. When he does so, he receives "such a colde welcome there, that beinge dispoyled of all his dignities, [he] was sent back vpo[n] a lame halting horse to the Tower" (903). A martyr on a lame mount or on a good steed in an improper position becomes a parody of a dignified horse and rider. This mockery shames the martyr. In an ideal relationship between a rider and his steed, the rider can display his strength and mastery. Disgraceful parodies of this relationship demonstrate the rider's vulnerability and lack of control. In these stories, Catholics alter the equine symbolism of power and dignity in order to humiliate

Protestant martyrs, and Protestant writers record the incidents to honor those martyrs. The interaction between Catholic and Protestant equine symbolism is especially strong in these cases.



Figure 4 *The Description of Windsore Castle*, from John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583); rpt. in David Loades, *John Foxe and the English Reformation* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997; 102).

A similar type of shaming occurs when an individual is denied the privilege of riding. Foxe includes the story of Henry Sudphen, a martyr who asks to ride a horse after being forced to walk barefoot for an entire night. His captors refuse to let him ride, saying, “Must we hire a horse for an hereticke? He shall goo a foote whether he will or no” (427). By denying Sudphen a horse, they both increase his physical pain and decrease his value as a human being. Once they label Sudphen a heretic, they do not think he is worth the money needed to rent a horse or worthy of the dignity that riding would allow him to maintain.

A fallen horseman is even more disgraced than someone forced to walk from the beginning. Falling from a horse reduces a rider from a state of pride and dignity to one of humiliation and contempt. Foxe exploits this imagery in the woodcut *Allegory of the Reformation*, in which King Henry VIII rests his feet on the back of Pope Clement VII (see fig.

5). In this picture, Clement is humbled both by Henry and by his own horse; the horse stands in the lower left corner of the woodcut, indicating that Clement has recently fallen. Because of his earlier attempts to exalt himself, the pope has received a crushing blow to his pride. Only a fall from a horse can shame a person in this manner. Stumbling while walking is a slight embarrassment, but it does not change one's status so drastically. Conversely, falling from a greater height is likely to kill a man, not just wound his pride. The combination of the horse's status as a symbol of pride with the physical realities of falling gives this imagery its uniquely derisive effect.



Figure 5 *Allegory of the Reformation*, from John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1570); rpt. in John King, *Tudor Royal Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; 159).

Attacks on papal pride appear in many other illustrations. Some of these show Christ riding on a humble ass in contrast to the pope riding on a decorated horse. The title page of *Verhor und Acta vor dem Byschoff von Meyssen* is one such illustration (see fig. 6). Christ,

armed only with a cross and riding on an ass, jousts with an armored pope on a warhorse. An armed soldier walks next to the pope, increasing his show of power. In spite of the pope's apparent strength, he loses the match, as indicated by his fallen lance (Scribner 62). Christ's humble victory emphasizes the futility of the pope's pride.

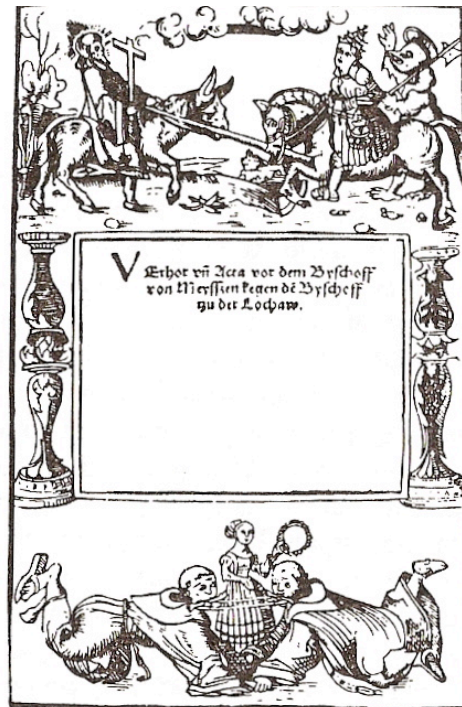


Figure 6 Titlepage to *Verhor und Acta vor dem Byschoff von Meyssen* (J. Grunenberg, Wittenberg, 1522); rpt. in R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; 61).

A similar contrast occurs in a pair of woodcuts in Louis Cranach's series *Passional Christi und Antichristi* (see fig. 7). The first woodcut shows Christ riding a lowly ass into Jerusalem. The ass's colt and a group of common people follow behind them. In the second woodcut, the pope and two of his companions ride on horses draped with decorative cloth. Armed soldiers lead the way on foot, and aristocrats follow behind. Christ, the epitome of truth and humility, needs no show of strength to attract followers, but the pope needs to display his wealth and might to gain people's support. Once again, the pope's beautifully decorated

warhorse becomes a symbol of empty pride instead of true strength. In Thomas Dekker's play *The Whore of Babylon*, a king makes the following observation:

Asses I see,
In nothing but in trappings, different be
From footcloth nags, on which gay fellows ride,
Saue that such gallants gallop in more pride.

This passage supports the idea that using a horse instead of an ass is essentially a show of pride; underneath the "trappings," there is nothing to warrant such a display.

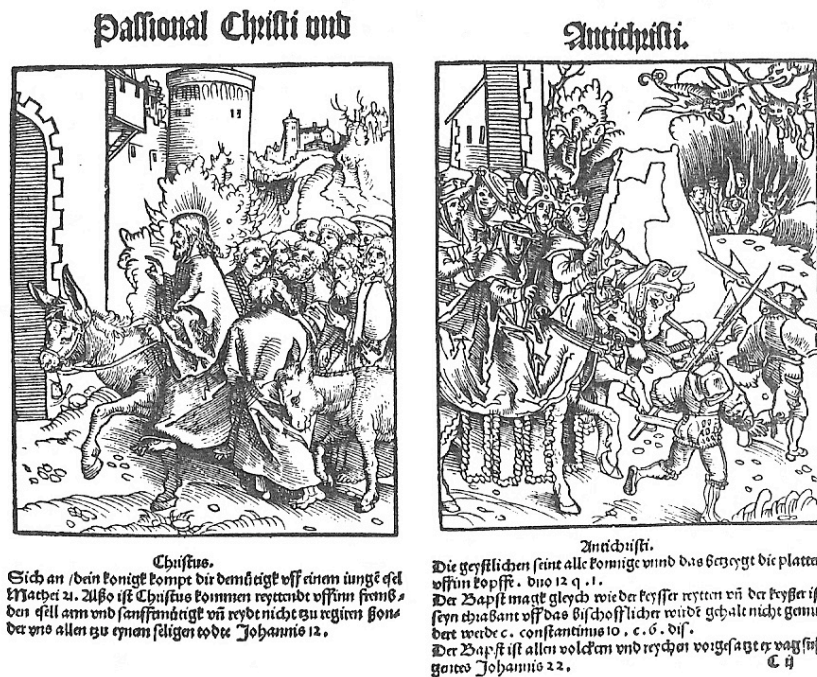


Figure 7 Woodcut from Lucas Cranach, *Passional Christi und Antichristi* (1521; fol. Ci v); rpt. in R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; 153).

When a woodcut depicts Christ riding on an ass, the ass represents Christian humility. However, in other contexts, asses can symbolize something entirely different. The ass's low status can become a sign of idiocy or misfortune instead of virtuous humility. An illustration in Sebastian Brant's *The Ship of Fools* uses asses to teach a lesson about pride, but the asses in this

picture symbolize foolishness, not humility (see fig. 8). Three figures wearing fools' hats cling to the wheel of fate as it turns. The figure facing downward has a human's torso and the lower body of an ass, while the figure facing upward has an ass's torso and a human's lower body. The figure on top of the wheel reaching for a prize is an ass with no human features. According to R. W. Scribner, this illustration is meant to remind "those fools who climb too high that a turn of the wheel will soon tumble them to earth" (118). The fact that the triumphant figure on top of the wheel is fully an ass is very important; it means that the more people act according to pride, vanity, and greed, the more foolish they become. Although it does not directly target the Catholic Church, the symbolism in this woodcut relates to illustrations of the proud, wealthy pope falling off his horse. Like one of Brant's asses, the pope has sought too much power, and fate has taken it away. The flexibility of equine symbolism allows Protestants to use asses to symbolize both Christ's humility and the pope's foolish pride.



Figure 8 Woodcut from Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools* (1499, fol. f6v); rpt. in R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; 119).

Leonhard Beck's woodcut *The Monk and the Ass* exploits the ass's reputation for foolishness in another way (see fig. 9). An ass wearing fools' clothes spins yarn, while a nun carried on a monk's back attempts to do the same. A scroll over the ass's head reads, "If I could not spin yarn thus, one would abuse me as an ass" (Scribner 40). The point of this illustration is that even a foolish ass is smarter and more useful than a Catholic monk or nun. On the other side of the debate, Parsons also uses the ass's silliness to insult an opponent. Thomas Morton complains of Parsons abusing him as "Asse, Silly grasshopper, Lewd lad" but then twists the original meaning by saying, "it cannot offend mee to be called Asse in that cause, wherein I carrie my Sauour in his Hozanna; nor to be termed Grasshopper in that cause, wherein I may be a plague vnto Aegypt" (15). Thanks to the flexibility of these images, Morton can choose the animals' biblical associations over their negative connotations in early modern culture and convert an intended insult into a compliment.



Figure 9 Leonhard Beck, *The Monk and the Ass* (1523); rpt. in R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; 40).

Ass imagery and symbolism take yet another meaning in Peter Fletner's woodcut *The Poor Common Ass* (see fig. 10). Scribner describes the scene:

The poor ass, signifying the common people, is ridden by Tyranny, Avarice, and Hypocrisy. The last, in the form of a monk clutching a money-bag, has been thrown off the [sic] lands ignominiously on the ground. However, Avarice in the form of a Jew is still seated astride the ass, flaying it alive, while Tyranny is also firmly seated in the saddle. In the centre stands the figure of Reason, holding a cloth before the eyes of the ass. (122)

The ass can no longer bear the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church, so it bucks off the monk. This is yet another example of an equine punishing a cleric for an excess of pride. As a symbol of the common people, the ass is the victim of the Church's Tyranny and Avarice. As Scribner observes, it is unclear whether Reason is blindfolding the ass or removing the blindfold to allow him to see and understand what is happening to him (122). Either way, the blindfold shows that the ass is the dupe of those in power. Whether he is entering this state or being freed from it is irrelevant to this interpretation. This illustration employs several different levels of ass symbolism. The ass represents the familiarity and humility of the common people as well as their foolishness in allowing themselves to be blinded and tricked by tyrants. However, even in the midst of all its troubles, the ass manages to mock the pride of the Catholic clergy.

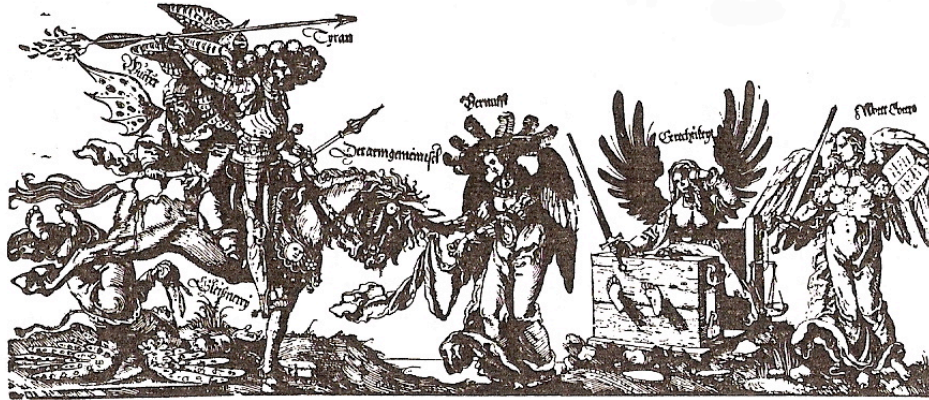


Figure 10 Peter Fletner, *The Poor Common Ass* (1525); rpt. in R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; 122).

In addition to being symbols of humility and foolishness, asses are also associated with demons (Scribner 85). The woodcut *Satire on Johann Cochleus* includes many demons, one of which has an ass's head (see fig. 11). Similarly, Melchior Lorch's *The Pope as a Wild Man* shows a demonic figure with two heads, one of which has the ears of an ass (see fig. 12). An even more striking example of the ass's evil associations is a woodcut of the Papal Ass (see fig. 13). This monstrous figure has the head of an ass and the torso of a woman. It walks on two legs, and each of its limbs ends in a different shape. Its left hand appears human, while the right hand is a hoof. Its feet are just as disturbing; its right foot is a cloven hoof, and its left resembles a bird's talons. On its backside are the face of an old man and a tail that appears to be a dragon's head and neck. The conglomeration of all these different animals is meant to portray the unnatural monstrosity of the papacy. Scribner summarizes Phillip Melanchthon's interpretation of the Papal Ass: "The whole stood for the papacy, the ass head for the pope. The Church should have no bodily head, and the ass head on the human torso was as fitting as the pope as head of the Church" (131). This analysis is helpful, but it does not directly address the significance of the ass head. After all, the head of any other animal would look just as incongruous. The artist must have chosen an ass head for a specific reason. Most likely, the head is meant to emphasize the

pope's foolishness or to mock his pride, but it could also be drawing on the established connection between asses and demons. The versatility of ass imagery allows the same symbol that is associated with Christ to be associated with the demonic as well.

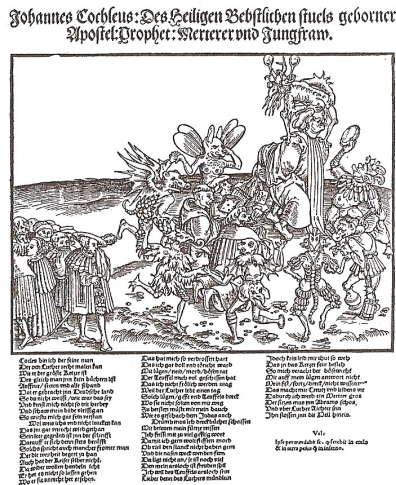


Figure 11 *Satire on Johann Cochleus*; rpt. in R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; 85).



Figure 12 Melchior Lorch, *The Pope as a Wild Man* (1545); rpt. in R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; 136).

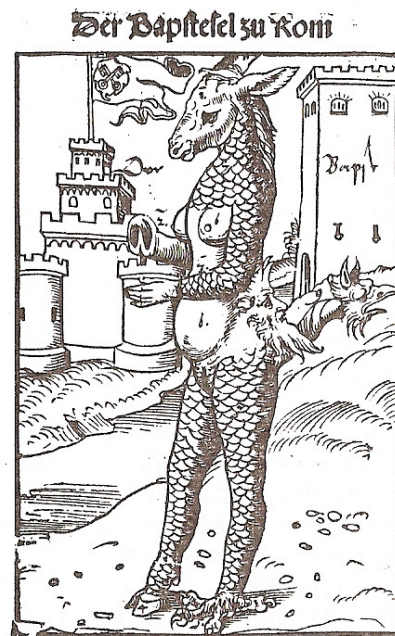


Figure 13 *The Papal Ass*, from Philip Melancthon, *Deutung der czwo grewlichen Figuren* (1523; fol. Ai); rpt. in R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; 129).

The symbolic meanings attached to horses, asses, and mules in martyr narratives and religious satire are so varied that it is impossible to assign one specific connotation to a particular equine. Horses and mules are generally linked with pride and dignity, but they can destroy that pride as easily as they can support it. In other contexts, these same animals can serve as metaphors for deception or promiscuity. Asses are even more problematic; they can symbolize anything from divine humility to human foolishness or even demonic tendencies. Both Catholics and Protestants employed equine symbolism in their writings and illustrations, and each side could twist the other's imagery to serve its own purposes. In these works, the inherent virtue of a horse, ass, or mule is not a specific trait or symbolic meaning. Rather, its true virtue is the flexibility that allows it to symbolize so many different things.

Chapter 2

Equine Imagery in *The Faerie Queene*

Book I of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* begins, "A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine," immediately signaling that knights on horseback will dominate the action of the poem (I.i.1.1). The Red Cross Knight's "angry steede" even earns himself a place in the first stanza, affirming his importance in both the symbolism and the plot. Given an opening that places such emphasis on horseback riding and horses themselves, it is no surprise that Spenser continues the equestrian theme throughout the narrative. What is surprising, however, is the general lack of scholarly interest in the equestrian aspects of *The Faerie Queene*. Few scholars have investigated the significance of the poem's horses, and several have assumed that the traditional rider-as-reason, horse-as-passion metaphor applies to the more prominent equestrian episodes. While this metaphor was popular in early modern culture, it certainly does not explain every horse-related event in *The Faerie Queene*. The complexity of *The Faerie Queene*'s equine imagery reflects the depth of the poem itself. Horses represent far more than passion and they occasionally even demonstrate reason of their own.

The case of Florimell's horse is a rare one in that the traditional association of horses with passion and riders with reason holds true. Florimell initially decides to ride in search of Marinell because of her love for him. In this passionate context, Florimell loses control of her horse: "And her white Palfrey hauing conquered / The maistring raines out of her weary wrest, / Perforce her carried, where euer he thought best" (III.vii.2.7-9). Spurred both by love of Marinell and fear of the Foster, Florimell is overcome by her passions and cannot subdue them with reason. Spenser's source for this scene was likely Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. In Sir John Harington's translation of this work, Angelica flees Renaldo in a similar manner. She "Upon her

horses necke doth lay the raine” and gives “her palfrey leave to chuse the way” (I.xiii.2; 5).

Neither woman can control her passions, so both allow their horses to run wherever they choose.

But Spenser is not always consistent with his symbolism. When Florimell flees for the second time, this time from the witch’s son and the Hyena, her horse represents her reputation instead of her passion. As Helen Megee Hogan writes, “Florimell’s palfrey sets the character of poor, pursued Florimell by his flight and by his pathetic end” (63). Florimell’s horse desperately tries to carry her to safety:

And her flitt Palfrey did so well apply
His nimble feet to her conceiued feare,
That whilest his breath did strength to him supply,
From perill free he her away did beare:

But when his force gan faile, his pace gan wex areare. (III.vii.24.5-9)

When Florimell’s exhausted horse can run no farther, she dismounts and continues on foot. The Hyena, which supposedly “feeds on wemens flesh, as others feede on gras,” instead “sett vpon her Palfrey tired lame, / And slew him cruelly, ere any reskew came” (III.vii.22.9; III.vii.28.8-9). The Hyena resembles Lust in its tendency to prey on women, but it cannot actually wound Florimell. In settling for devouring her horse, the Hyena behaves like Sclaunder or the Blatant Beast, whose worst wounds affect their victims’ reputations, not their physical bodies. In Florimell’s case, the witch’s son’s advances have just compromised her good name, and the Hyena devouring the horse is a physical representation of an injured reputation.

Like Florimell’s palfrey, Pyrrhocles’s horse also dies in place of his rider. While Florimell’s horse represents her reputation, Pyrrhocles’s horse is a more direct representation of the rider himself. The perpetually angry Pyrrhocles rides a horse that is “bloody red, and fomed

yre, / When with the maistring spur he did him roughly stire” (II.v.2.8-9). In a discussion of the colors and humoral composition of horses, Thomas Blundeville writes that if a horse is composed chiefly “of the fier, then is he cholorique, and therefore lighte, whote, and fiery, a sterer, and seldome of anye great strength, and is wont to be of colour a bright sorell” (I.1). When referring to horses, sorrel means bright reddish brown. The color of Pyrrhocles’s horse reflects the fiery, choleric temperament he and his rider share. In a depiction of an overly passionate equestrian, one might expect the horse to take control, but Pyrrhocles is still “maistring” his steed. This is not a dichotomy of horse and rider representing passion and reason. Pyrrhocles’s horse is an extension of his faculties rather than another force to be controlled.

Both horse and rider are furious and heedless, so it is only fitting that one also becomes headless. Pyrrhocles charges Guyon, who must defend himself on foot against a mounted knight. Guyon attempts to strike Pyrrhocles, but his blow hits the horse instead:

With his bright blade did smite at him so fell,
That the bright steele arriuing forcibly
On his broad shield, bitt not, but glauncing fell
On his horse necke before the quilted sell,
And from the head the body sundred quight. (II.v.4.1-5)

Pyrrhocles’ horse dies as a result of his own and his rider’s fury. The connection between man and beast becomes even more apparent when “The truncked beast fast bleeding, did him fowly dight” (II.v.4.9). The originally blood red horse becomes truly bloody, and his rider is covered in gore. Pyrrhocles and his horse are no longer merely partners; they are joined by blood. Just as the horse’s fury allows Guyon to smite him, Pyrrhocles’s reckless anger allows Furor and Occasion to overcome him.

The Red Cross Knight's horse's color is just as significant as that of Pyrrhocles's horse. When Duessa accuses the Red Cross Knight of raping her, she tells Guyon "I wote not, how he hight, / But vnder him a gray steede he did wield, / Whose sides with dappled circles weren dight" (II.i.18.6-7). A. C. Hamilton speculates that "since the lustful Argante rides a grey horse at III.vii.37.3, the colour may represent the lust with which the Red Cross Knight is charged" (II.i.18.6n). However, Blundeville's comments on horses' coloring indicate that this conjecture is unlikely: "But when he doth participate of all the foure Elements equallie, and in due proportion, then is he perfect, and most commonlie shall be one of these colours following. That is to say, a browne bay, a dapple gray, a blacke full of silver haire, a blacke like a Moore, or a faire rone, which kinds of horses are most commendable, most temperate, strongest, and of gentlest nature" (I.1). Spenser never mentions the color of the Red Cross Knight's horse in Book I. At his first appearance, the horse does not display the virtues of a dapple gray. Instead, the "angry steede did chide his foming bitt, / As much disdain[ing] to the curbe to yield" (I.i.1.6-7). However, by the time the horse's color is revealed in Book II, the Red Cross Knight has grown enough in his virtue that he is worthy of a valiant but temperate steed.

During the Red Cross Knight's battle with the dragon, his horse is a significant part of three successive incidents. First, the dragon knocks both horse and rider to the ground, but they immediately rise to continue the fight (I.xi.16-17). Next, it "Snatcht vp both horse and man, to beare them quite away," but by "struggling strong," the Red Cross Knight and his horse manage to free themselves (I.xi.18.9; I.xi.19 3-4). In the third incident, the dragon's tale trips the Red Cross Knight's horse, and when he struggles to free himself, he inadvertently throws his rider (I.xi.23.1-7). Hamilton notes that the horse "cooperates in his fall," but this interpretation is problematic (I.xi.23.5n). Only five stanzas earlier, the knight and horse escaped the dragon by

struggling against the dragon, so it is not quite fair to blame the horse for attempting to do so again. Spenser's main reason for removing the horse from the action at this point is probably to shift the focus from the Red Cross Knight's riding abilities to the armor of faith and weapons of truth he bears. Because the Red Cross Knight finally understands his faith, he needs no extra assistance from his horse to defeat the evil dragon.

Britomart's horse also falls in battle but remains relatively unscathed. When Arthegall fights Britomart, he unintentionally strikes her horse:

So sorely he her stroke, that thence it glaunst
 Adowne her backe, the which it fairely blest
 From foule mischance; ne did it euer rest,
 Till on her horses hinder parts it fell;
 Where byting deepe, so deadly it imprest,
 That quite it chynd his backe behind the sell,
 And to alight on foote her algates did compel. (IV.vi.13.3-9)

After Arthegall injures her horse, Britomart "no whit dismayd, her steed forsooke" (IV.vi.14.6).

Given the description of the "deadly" blow and the forsaking of the steed, one might initially infer that Britomart's horse has died. However, once the conflict is resolved, Arthegall and Britomart mount "their steeds, and forward thence did pas" (IV.vi.39.3). Britomart and her horse are both healthy and capable of travel. Because Arthegall and Britomart are destined for marriage, neither one can seriously injure the other. They cannot "bathe their hands in bloud of dearest freend, / Thereby to make their loues beginning, their liues end" (IV.vi.17.8-9). In several other episodes, Britomart is victorious even after removing pieces of her armor or getting into compromising situations that would be the downfall of male knights like the Red Cross Knight.

Somehow, these actions and attacks do not affect Britomart, and her horse remaining unscathed after a fierce battle is an extension of Britomart herself safely defeating her enemies.

Like Britomart's horse, Arthur's Spumador also experiences a harrowing moment.

Gerioneo attempts to kill Arthur, but he hits Spumador instead:

But the sad steele seizd not, where it was hight,
 Vppon the childe, but somewhat short did fall,
 And lighting on his horses head, him quite did mall.
 Downe streight to ground fell his astonisht steed,
 And eke to th'earth his burden with him bare:
 But he him selfe full lightly from him freed,
 And gan him selfe to fight on foote prepare. (V.xi.8.7-9.4)

Despite being "malled," Spumador is perfectly fine a few stanzas later. Arthur "to his former journey him addrest, / On which long way he rode, ne euer day did rest" (V.xi.35.8-9). Just like the heroic Arthur cannot remain defeated, Spumador cannot be seriously harmed.

Spumador is a complicated horse. Spenser calls him a "Lybian steed," which Hamilton explains as "Arabian; evidently a type of excellence" (II.viii.17.9; n). While Spenser does praise the horse as Arthur's "courageous steed" and "The fierce Spumador borne of heauenly seed," not all of the associations are completely positive (II.xi.19.6; 9). Spenser describes Arthur and Spumador:

A goodly person, and could menage faire,
 His stubborn steed with curbed canon bitt,
 Who under him did amble as the aire,
 And chauft, that any on his backe should sitt,

The yron rowels into frothy fome he bitt. (I.vii.37.6-9)

Evidently, Arthur has some difficulty controlling Spumador. A curb bit is designed to give the rider more leverage and control than a simple snaffle would provide. Arthur may need extra control because of Spumador's breed. The distinctions between Arabian, Turkish, and Barbary horses are not always clear. Elizabeth Tobey explains the difference: "Sometimes confused with another ancient breed, the Arabian horse, the Barb is distinguished from the Arabian in that its head is straight or convex, lacking the 'dished' profile of the latter" (68). She also claims that the "Turk or Turcoman" has great stamina resulting from its "Arabian blood" (70). If we take Spenser's "Lybian" to mean "Arabian" and therefore "Turk," Blundeville's remarks on the breed may explain why Arthur has trouble with his feisty horse. He says that "for the most parte they will be euill mouthed...whereby they waxe so hedde stronge, as they be not easely brought to make a good stoppe" (3). This characteristic both justifies Arthur's use of a curb bit and explains why Spumador "chaufft" at being ridden. Blundeville has further insight into horses of Spumador's breed: "they be of nature verye couragious, and will do more by gentle meanes than by stripes or great threatenings, for that maketh them more desperate and bringeth them cleane out of order" (3). Much of Spenser's praise of Spumador relates to his courage, so his description matches Blundeville's. While Arthur may need a curb bit to control the courageous and headstrong Spumador, there is no indication that he rides roughly. He can "menage fair" by being assertive, not abusive.

The term "menage" has special equestrian significance. This type of riding requires great discipline in both horse and rider. "Menage," or "manège," meaning "riding arena," involves collection, meaning that the rider builds the horse's energy through leg pressure but controls the length of the horse's stride by maintaining firm contact with his mouth (Tucker 282). Riding in a

collected manner engages the horse's hind end and makes him round his back and neck, carrying his head approximately perpendicular to the ground. Once horse and rider master this collection, they can start to perform the very intricate and complex movements of manège, several of which are based on cavalry training. The fact that Arthur can "menage" Spumador indicates that he is a very accomplished equestrian, which, in the context of *The Faerie Queene*, identifies him as an ideal knight.

In Book V, Arthur and Spumador are placed in direct opposition to the Souldan and his horses. In contrast to the knights who ride their horses, the Souldan opts to drive "a charret hye, / With yron wheelles and hookes arm'd dreadfully" (V.viii.28.4-5). The use of a chariot instantly marks the Souldan as different from the heroic Arthur. Driving instead of riding appears to be a sign of evil. Lucifera rides in a coach, Night delivers Sansjoy to Aesculapius in her chariot, and Proteus abducts Florimell in his. Part of the reason for the association of the chariot with evil is the fact that a chariot requires multiple horses. In a poem that constantly reinforces the idea that unity is holy and multiplicity is sinful, someone who attempts to drive multiple horses is evil. The diminished connection between the horse and his master means that the knightly "menage" is not possible, so according to the values of *The Faerie Queene*, chariot drivers are automatically less praiseworthy than mounted knights. The chariot also poses a different sort of challenge to Arthur. He cannot joust against a man in a chariot, so he must adapt his usual knightly behavior to more effectively fight the Souldan.

The Souldan's horses make the distinction between accomplished riding and unskillful driving very clear. In contrast to the courageous Spumador, the exuberant Brigadore, or even Pyrrhocles's passionate mount, the horses that pull the Souldan's chariot are truly evil. Like the Hyena that eats women's flesh, these steeds eat the "flesh of men" (V.viii.28.7). In a herbivorous

animal, a willingness to feast on human flesh is especially heinous. Even Spumador, “all were he much renound / For noble courage, and for hardie race, / Durst not endure their sight, but fled from place to place” (V.viii.36.7-9). While Spumador cannot abide the evil of these unnatural horses, the sight of Arthur’s shining shield forces them to flee and completely disregard the Souldan. Arthur’s knightly equestrian skills allow him to direct Spumador to chase the very steeds he fears, but once the Souldan’s horses are frightened, they wrest all control from him.

Of all the horses in *The Faerie Queene*, Guyon’s Brigadore displays the most personality. While the other knights’ horses obey their commands, albeit somewhat grudgingly, Brigadore clearly expresses his own opinion of those around him, sometimes by directly sabotaging those he deems unworthy. Waldo McNeir writes that when Braggadocchio steals Brigadore, he manages to ride him “for a long time apparently without any trouble” (104). However, by examining Brigadore’s behavior immediately after being stolen, we see that Braggadocchio fails to meet the horse’s standards:

Lo to his steed he gott, and gan to ride,
 As one vnfitt therefore, that all might see
 He had not trained bene in cheualree.
 Which well that valiaunt courser did discern;
 For he despisd to tread in dew degree,
 But chaufd and fom’d, with corage fiers and sterne,
 And to be easd of that base burden still did erne. (II.iii.46.3-9)

Evidently, Braggadocchio does have some “trouble” managing Brigadore. His inability to manage a spirited steed highlights his inadequacy as a knight. As a knight not trained in chivalry, he lacks both the social and equestrian skills that he should possess. In contrast, Guyon, “the

rightfull owner of that steede, / Who well could menage and subdew his pride,” embodies true knighthood, and Brigadore displays the spirit and understanding ideal for a knightly steed (II.iv.2.1-2).

Brigadore steals the scene when Guyon attempts to reclaim him from Braggadocchio in Book V. Guyon, the paragon of temperance, lays one hand on Brigadore’s “golden bit” to claim him (V.iii.29.6). According to Hamilton’s notes in *The Faerie Queene*, Brigadore’s name comes from Brigliadoro, “bridle of gold,” in *Orlando Furioso*, and this bridle symbolizes “the rule of temperance, the golden mean, over the willful passions symbolized by the horse” (V.iii.34.3n). Hamilton’s interpretation is fairly standard. After all, bridles and bits typically symbolize discipline and control. In a discussion of the equestrian use and social significance of bits, Pia Cuneo writes, “Usually, the bridle and bit in images signify self-control that is socially and even morally beneficial. The virtue of Temperance, for example, is sometimes depicted as a female personification who actually wears a bridle...The need for passions to be subject to Prudence is exemplified by a man restraining an unruly horse by firmly grasping the lead rope attached to the horse’s halter” (156). Given the widespread association of bridles and bits with reason and horses with passion, Hamilton’s interpretation is reasonable. However, if the temperate Guyon uses this golden bridle to control his horse, Brigadore should not attack innocent people like he does immediately after Guyon touches the bridle:

...one did take

The horse in hand, within his mouth to looke:

But with his heeles so sorely he him strake,

That all his ribs he quite in peeces broke,

That neuer word from that day forth he spoke.

Another that would seeme to haue more wit,
 Him by the bright embrodered hedstall tooke:
 But by the shoulder him so sore he bit,
 That he him maimed quite, and all his shoulder split. (V.iii.33.1-9)

If we momentarily apply Hamilton's interpretation, we might be tempted to explain Brigadore's violent behavior by saying that he acts out with these handlers because they are not as temperate as Guyon; they are unable to correctly use the golden bridle to calm his passion.

While this hypothesis seems reasonable at first, it becomes more problematic as the story continues. Guyon calls Brigadore by name, and "Eftsoones he stood as still as any stake" (V.iii.34.5). However, Brigadore's calm stillness does not last long: "And when as he him nam'd for joy he brake / His bands, and follow'd him with gladfull glee, / And friskt, and flong aloft, and louted low on knee" (V.iii.34.7-9). Interestingly, Brigadore's response places him in direct opposition to the Souldan's horses, who ignore their master's instructions: "He to them calles and speakes, yet nought auayles; / They heare him not, they haue forgot his lore, / But go, which way they list, their guide they haue forlore" (V.viii.39.7-9). The Souldan cannot control his horses by force or by voice, which demonstrates his unworthiness. In contrast, all of the truly knightly figures in *The Faerie Queene* can control their steeds. Arthur guides Spumador with a bit, but Guyon has apparently trained Brigadore to respond to his voice alone.

The "bands" that Brigadore breaks must be his bridle. It is the only piece of tack mentioned in the scene, and it is the only logical piece for the horse to break in this context. Brigadore has just kicked a man, so he obviously has not been hobbled. The only other pieces of equipment he could break would be the saddle or the girth holding it in place. In a similar scene in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, Adonis's horse escapes to chase a mare by breaking

multiple pieces of tack. He “Breaketh his rein,” and “his woven girths he breaks asunder” (line 264; 266). Finally, “The iron bit he crushes ‘tween his teeth, / Controlling what he was controlled with” (269-270). A struggling horse is much less likely to break a girth or saddle than a bridle, so if Spenser had intended Brigadore to break a saddle or girth, he would have specified the piece of tack like Shakespeare did. As it stands, Brigadore appears to break his bridle. Since he does so upon hearing Guyon’s voice, the bridle cannot represent a temperate restraint. This scenario would indicate that Brigadore is so joyful at being returned to temperance that in his passion, he destroys the physical representation of that temperance. Guyon’s true power over Brigadore comes from a mutually loyal partnership, not from a restraining bridle.

An examination of Spenser’s likely sources for this scene yields a better explanation for the bridleless interaction between Guyon and Brigadore. Guyon speaking to Brigadore is reminiscent of Christ as the Good Shepherd: “My sheepe heare my voyce, and I knowe them, and they follow me” (*The Geneva Bible*, John 10.27). Brigadore follows Guyon like the sheep follow the shepherd, but he makes a deliberate decision to do so. The sheep are trusting, but the horse obviously has more of a thought process. A more direct source for this scene is *Orlando Furioso*, in which the horse Bayardo refuses to let Renaldo, his owner, mount (I.32). However, when Bayardo meets Angelica, he remembers her previous kindness and allows her to take “the bridell boldly in her hand” (I.lxxvi.1). While it is Angelica’s kindness that calms Bayardo, it is the Pagan Sacrapant who mounts him. Spenser alters this story in *The Faerie Queene* by allowing only the rightful owner to control the unruly horse. It is not merely angelic kindness that prompts Brigadore’s actions. His behavior toward Guyon and others is probably the result of careful training, not just fond memories or voice recognition.

McNeir suggests Michel de Montaigne's "Des Destries," or "Of war horses," as a source for Brigadore's actions. He mentions a parallel between Montaigne's description of Bucephalus, the horse who refused to allow anyone but Alexander the Great to ride him, and Spenser's description of Brigadore but argues that Montaigne's account of warhorses trained to fight for their masters is more relevant (104). McNeir makes a valid point here; Montaigne's portrayal of warhorses' fighting techniques sounds much like Spenser's description of Brigadore's wild behavior: "There are many horses trained to help their masters, to hurl themselves with feet and teeth on those who attack and confront them; but they turn out to hurt their friends more often than their enemies" (210). Like the uncontrolled warhorses, Brigadore attacks those who approach him with both teeth and hooves and unnecessarily injures those who are only trying to return him to his rightful owner.

Montaigne's essay also provides insight into Brigadore's commendable behavior while he is unbridled. Montaigne praises the Roman soldiers who trained their horses to run "at top speed side by side without bridle or saddle" (209). He also mentions that the Massilians "rode their horses without saddle or bridle" and that Quintus Fabius Maximus Rutilianus ordered that his soldiers "unbridle their horses" so nothing could stop their charge (213; 214). If Spenser did use this essay as a source, he could not have missed these references to riding bridleless. While Guyon is not actually riding when Brigadore breaks his bridle, there is still a significant connection. In all these cases, an unbridled horse still obeys its owner. The point of this type of horsemanship is not to forcefully constrain the horse's movement but to take advantage of his freedom.

In this part of the scene, Brigadore is completely unrestrained, but he still chooses to follow Guyon. The golden bridle is insignificant, and the assumption that Brigadore represents

passion that must be restrained, while common, is wrong. McNeir writes, “The calming of Brigadore by Guyon...is an example of that fine horsemanship involving absolute control over the animal” (104). The calming itself may illustrate this principle, but Brigadore’s subsequent actions do not. C. S. Lewis states that the virtue temperance “is a dull and pedestrian one to fallen man. That is why Guyon loses his horse in the second canto. It is better that he should be without it, for he found it difficult to restrain its pace to that of the Palmer and impossible to pull up in the presence of St George” (338). However, there is no indication that Guyon has difficulty slowing or stopping Brigadore. Guyon “taught his trampling steed with equal steps to tread” to keep pace with the Palmer (II.i.7.8-9). There is no mention of a bridle or a curb bit in this passage, but Guyon can obviously control his horse’s pace. In fact, Archimago asks Guyon to stop and listen to him, and Guyon easily “stayd his steed for humble misers sake,” and when St. George and Guyon joust, St. George, not Guyon has trouble halting his horse (II.i.9.1; II.i.27.8-9). Like C. S. Lewis, Judith Anderson claims that Guyon’s “Palmer is associated with his reason; his horse, with his heroic passions and aspirations” (160). All of these arguments rely on the traditional connotations of horses, bits, and bridles and neglect the fact that Spenser frequently alters well-known images to serve a different purpose. The guiding Palmer does represent reason, but so does Brigadore. Brigadore is the only character to immediately see through Braggadocchio’s appearance of chivalry, and he struggles against him. The fact that Brigadore follows Guyon even when unbridled is even more significant. The Palmer represents reason that guides temperance, but in freely and joyfully following Guyon, Brigadore signifies reason resulting from a free acceptance of temperance.

In contrast to the multitude of characters who ride horses, only three characters ride asses. The discrepancy in numbers is enough to signal that an ass is symbolically significant, but its

meaning is more difficult to identify. *The Faerie Queene* is by no means unique in using mounts to highlight differences between riders; these differences form the basis of much of the equine symbolism in the religious texts discussed in the previous chapter. However, while the juxtaposition is common, the meanings attached to asses and horses are not consistent. In *The Faerie Queene* alone, such varied characters as Una, Idleness, and Mirabella ride asses. Obviously, Spenser is not equating the virtuous Una with Idleness by giving them similar mounts.

In the case of Una, the ass represents Christ-like humility. Una rides “Vpon a lowly Asse more white then snow” (I.i.3.2). The image of a holy individual choosing to ride a “lowly” ass instead of an elegant horse is a familiar one. Most of these images derive from the story of Jesus riding an ass into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (*The Geneva Bible*, John 12:12-15). Like Jesus, Una chooses not to exalt herself by riding a horse. Not all of the ass’s associations are so positive. Several of the early modern texts and woodcuts previously discussed exploit asses’ reputation for being slow or foolish. In *The Faerie Queene*, Idleness rides “a slouthfull Asse” in the parade of the seven deadly sins in Lucifera’s House of Pride (I.iv.18.7). Idleness’s choice of mount is clearly not an expression of humility like Una’s. Rather, it displays his ignorance and laziness.

The ass serves yet another function in Book VI; Mirabella also rides “vpon an Asse” (VI.vii.27.8). In this case, Mirabella is doing penance for her former pride in rejecting lovers. Doomed to abuse by Scorne and Disdaine, Mirabella has little control over her own life and probably does not have the option of selecting a more elegant mount. Riding an ass is most likely part of Mirabella’s penance. Her mount implies humility, but it is not a freely chosen humility like Una’s. Mirabella’s is an enforced humility, or rather a degradation resulting from Cupid’s

anger at her contempt for love. Connected to Una through a common mount, Mirabella becomes a tragic parody of Una herself.

More significantly, Mirabella's mount is not always called an ass. At VI.vi.16.8, the animal is "a mangy jade," and at VI.vii.40.7, it is a "tyreling jade." Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* does admit that the word "jade" is "rarely applied to a donkey," Spenser's discrepancy in terminology is more than a rare usage. At VI.vii.39.8, the animal in question is called "her horse." It is unlikely that Mirabella switches between riding a horse and riding an ass, so there must be another explanation. A similar alteration in description occurs with Una's mount. When the satyrs attempt to worship the animal, it is clearly identified as an ass (I.vi.19.9). However, at I.iii.8.8, the beast is called "her snowy Palfrey." "Palfrey" is not typically a term used for an ass. In fact, the *OED* does not even mention the possibility of this application. In the cases of both Una and Mirabella, Spenser is careful to describe the animals as asses when this identification carries a specific theological or allegorical significance, but when the species matters less, he refers to them as horses.

The Faerie Queene is full of equine imagery, and each equestrian episode adds meaning to the poem. Although several scholars have assumed that the horses symbolize passion that must be bridled and restrained, there are many cases in which this interpretation does not completely make sense. The horses display individual characteristics and personalities, and they represent a variety of complex ideas. Florimell's horse does initially symbolize her passion, but later it represents her wounded reputation. Pyrrhocles's raging steed is an extension of himself. The hardheaded but courageous Spumador allows Arthur to demonstrate his equestrian and chivalric skills, highlighting his status as the epitome of virtue and knighthood. Brigadore, the most complicated horse in the poem, displays the insight and reason that the humans frequently

lack. The few asses in the poem only carry meaning in relation to horses; when the distinction is not important, the two categories merge. Only the truly knightly characters successfully manage spirited horses, and the horses' submission is voluntary, not forced. The knights' horses allow them to display both their equestrian and chivalric skills, and without them, the journey through Faerie Land would be "a dull and pedestrian one" indeed.

Chapter 3

Horseplay: Whores and Horses in City Comedies

The imagery of horseback riding, bridling, and control takes on yet another meaning in several city comedies. George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston's *Eastward Ho*, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, and John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize* use equestrian events and metaphors to illustrate the battle of the sexes. In the cultural context of these plays, men enjoyed more social power and freedom than women, and women were associated with animals because of their lower standing. The connection between women and horses was especially prevalent. Men were supposed to control their wives as they would their horses, and disorderly women were mocked with equine labels. *Eastward Ho* typically follows this pattern by placing women in the role of the horse, but in *The Roaring Girl* and *The Woman's Prize*, women become riders who exercise both sexual and social power over men.

In *Eastward Ho*, the citizen's daughter Gertrude is obsessed with marrying a knight and owning coach-horses, which she sees as status symbols to match her new title of "Lady." Anticipating the joys she will experience as the wife of a knight, she gloats to her mother that "my coach-horses must take the wall of your coach-horses" (I.ii.107-108). Mistress Touchstone obviously does not own coach-horses, but the fact that Gertrude transfers this sign of social prominence to her horses is significant. Gertrude apparently believes that her title will make her so important that even her coach-horses will enjoy a higher status.

Gertrude's coach-horses may get her into trouble. In London, coaches developed a reputation for being brothels-on-wheels, and Gertrude could potentially use her new coach for this purpose. Watching Gertrude leave in her coach for her new country estate, the wayward apprentice Quicksilver remarks to Sir Petronal, "They longed for a vagary into the country, and

now they are fitted: so a woman marry to ride in a coach, she cares not if she rides to her ruin. 'Tis the great end of many marriages. This is not the first time a lady has rid a false journey in her coach, I hope" (III.ii.182-186). Gertrude is either nonchalantly unaware of the implications of riding in a coach, or the association does not bother her. In light of her earlier conversation with Poldavy, the latter is more likely. Poldavy instructs Gertrude in the ways of the court: "O, ay, now you are in the lady-fashion, you must do all things light. Tread light, light. Ay, and fall so: that's the court-amble" (I.ii.57-59). Gertrude asks, "Has the court ne'er a trot?" and Poldavy responds, "No, but a false gallop, lady" (I.ii.60-61). An amble, a trot, and a false gallop (or canter) are all gaits of horses. Using these equine terms, Poldavy cheekily associates the court with light and false sexuality, and Gertrude goes along with it. This conversation certainly does not make her any less eager to become a lady and behave like a courtier. Gertrude's desire for social standing far outweighs her desire for a reputation of chastity.

Like Gertrude, Quicksilver places a great deal of emphasis on social status and the horses that allow him to display it. Quicksilver is Touchstone's apprentice, but he believes that the fact that his father is a gentleman justifies his behaving like a gallant. Quicksilver owns at least a "running gelding" and a "hunting nag," both of which are inappropriate to his status as an apprentice (II.ii.43; IV.ii.210). He insists on dressing above his station as well as keeping horses, prompting Touchstone to mock him for "standing at livery with his mare" (IV.ii.213).

Quicksilver's marks of social status extend beyond horses and clothing. His most reprehensible act is to keep a whore during his apprenticeship. Interestingly, this whore is usually mentioned in the same breath as the horses. Touchstone, for example, is upset that Quicksilver keeps "his whore and his hunting nag," and Quicksilver's fellow inmates in debtors' prison mention his history of keeping "a stable of hunting horses; and his wench in her velvet gown,

and her cloth of silver” (V.iii.41-42). Finally, in his penitent song, Quicksilver himself admits, “I kept my gelding, and my punk” (V.v.58). The equation of whores and horses is not difficult to explain. Men dominate both horses and whores, which are both available for hire. It does not take much imagination to see a resemblance between the motion of horseback riding and sexual intercourse. In the words of Linda Boose, “to ‘mount’ and ‘ride’ a woman works both literally and metaphorically to exert control over the imagined disorder presumed to result from ‘the woman on top’” (146-147). By maintaining both a horse and a whore, Quicksilver attempts to emphasize his status as a gentleman’s son instead of his status as an apprentice. He projects a powerful, masculine image of himself as whore- and horse-master, but he ends up displaying his inability to bridle and restrain his pride and lust.

In contrast to Gertrude and Quicksilver, obedient, temperate Mildred uses a horse-related description to illustrate the necessity of control over one’s passions and desires: “I have observed that the bridle given to those violent flatteries of fortune is seldom recovered, they bear one headlong in desire from one novelty to another and, where those ranging appetites reign, there is ever more passion than reason, no stay, and so no happiness” (II.i.60-64). Mildred’s remark draws on traditional associations of horses with passion and bridles with virtuous restraint. Critic Pia Cuneo describes this type of symbolism: “Usually, the bridle and bit in images signify self-control that is socially and even morally beneficial. The virtue of Temperance, for example, is sometimes depicted as a female personification who actually wears a bridle... The need for the passions to be subject to Prudence is exemplified by a man restraining an unruly horse by firmly grasping the lead rope attached to the horse’s halter” (156). By using the well-known image of a horse and rider, Mildred demonstrates that she, unlike her unbridled sister, can avoid excess and live moderately.

During the tempest in *Eastward Ho*, Slitgut describes the raging Thames in equine terms: “What a coil the Thames keeps! She bears some unjust burden, I believe, that she kicks and curvets thus to cast it. Heaven bless all honest passengers that are on her back now, for the bit is out of her mouth I see, and she will run away with ‘em” (IV.i.11-14). In addition to becoming equine in nature, the Thames also becomes female. However, personifications of the Thames are not consistently female. In Thomas Dekker and Ben Jonson’s *The Magnificent Entertainment*, the Thames is masculine, and in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, the male Thames weds the female Medway in an aquatic ceremony (IV.xi.8-53). Slitgut’s choice to describe the Thames as an unruly mare rather than a spirited stallion reflects society’s depiction of women as lesser, more passionate animals who need to be controlled by male reason. When a horse takes control of a rider, the natural social order is inverted; the same phenomenon occurs when a woman is insubordinate to a man.

The Roaring Girl’s Moll Cutpurse has much to say about the frequent conflation of women and horses. Although the prologue assures us that Moll is not a “City-roaring girl, whose pride, / Feasting and riding, shakes her husband’s state,” she is frequently associated with horses and riding. As an androgynous cross-dressed figure, she plays with equestrian language to put herself in the place of either horse or rider, depending on the message she hopes to send. She uses both images when she agrees to meet Laxton in Gray’s Inn Fields. First she asks, “Do you think I cannot ride a stone-horse unless one lead him by the snaffle?” (III.244-245). Moll asserts her equestrian ability by claiming to be able to ride an uncastrated male horse, but her mention of a snaffle is especially telling. Snaffle bits are very mild and do not give the rider as much leverage as a more severe curb bit does. Moll can ride a fiery stallion without relying on the extra control that a curb bit would allow her. The sexually charged image of a woman riding a stallion

catches Laxton's interest, and he replies, "Yes, and sit him bravely, I know thou canst, Moll" (III.246). By responding in this way, Laxton both subordinates himself to Moll and pronounces his status as a virile young gentleman.

Eager to exercise his newly affirmed sexual abilities, Laxton suggests to Moll that they "be merry and lie together" and offers to "hire a coach with four horses" (III.255-256). Temporarily humoring Laxton, Moll says, "I thought 'twould be a beastly journey! You may leave out one well,--three horses will serve, if I play the jade myself" (III.257-258). Only moments after using equestrian language to assert her sexual power over men like Laxton, she seems to subordinate herself through the same type of rhetoric. The term "jade" was used to describe worthless or uncooperative horses as well sexually unruly women, and by applying it to herself, Moll essentially negates the equestrian and sexual authority that she has so recently claimed.

But Moll does not keep up the appearance of submission for long. Shortly after Laxton walks away, Moll sighs, "Women are courted but ne'er soundly tried, / As many walk in spurs that never ride" (III.297-298). Besides being a snide remark on the large number of unworthy knights recently dubbed by King James I, Moll's comment reveals her disgust with the lack of equestrian and sexual prowess in men. Moll apparently does not entirely approve of the women she sees, either. Because the men are only poor imitations of knighthood, the women are never truly tempted, and Moll is skeptical of women's ability to resist the advances of a more virile man; women may become whores if they meet men who can actually "ride."

The whore/horse connection is further developed when Laxton arrives at Gray's Inn Fields. Like *Eastward Ho*, *The Roaring Girl* also plays with the idea of coaches as brothels-on-wheels in a way that makes the association of whores and horses even more obvious. Laxton

hires a coach for his intended assignation, and the coachman tells him about his horses: “Why, they are the same jades, believe it sir, that have drawn all your famous whores to Ward...They’re so used to such journeys, sir, I never use whip to ‘em, for if they catch but the scent of a wench once, they run like devils” (V.15-22). In this scene, the whores and horses are not conflated; rather, they have been associated with each other enough that they recognize each other. If coach-horses spend enough time with whores that they automatically know where to take them, it is no wonder that people begin to conflate them and assign the characteristics of one to the other.

Moll uses yet another equestrian metaphor to mock Laxton when she meets him at Gray’s Inn Fields. She throws money at Laxton, saying “There’s the gold / With which you hired your hackney, here’s her pace: / She racks hard, and perhaps your bones will feel it” (V.59-61). A rack is also a horse’s gait, which *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines as “A fast, four-beat gait in which both hoofs on one side, the hind just before the front, are lifted before both those on the other side are set down, the hind also preceding the front, each contact with the ground being made at equal intervals.” As the editors of the Oxford edition of the play note, a rack is also a torture device that would injure Laxton’s bones (V.61n). Moll is punning on both definitions of “rack.” Laxton, lacking stones, is poorly equipped to ride a horse or a woman, and Moll warns him that he might hurt himself if he tries. A similar type of mocking occurs in *The Woman’s Prize*. Tranio tells Moroso “A good tough train would break thee all to pieces: / Thou hast not breath enough to say thy prayers” (I.iii.12-13).

Moll is not the only woman in *The Roaring Girl* to mock men for their inability to deliver sexually. Mistress Tiltyard initially refers to the gallants as “stone-riders,” meaning riders of stallions, but she is disillusioned by the end of the play (III.132). Moll turns out to be the only

one who actually can “ride a stone-horse.” Mistress Gallipot eventually calls Laxton a “lame gelding,” which speaks to his utter lack of virility. Finally, in a conversation with Goshawk, Mistress Openwork asserts her own sexual prowess over that of her husband. Goshawk offers to bring Mistress Openwork to where her husband stands “at rack and manger” with his whore, and she exclaims, “I’ll saddle him in’s kind, and spur him till he kick again!” (VI.180-181). According to Goshawk, Openwork is behaving like a stallion mating with a mare, and Mistress Openwork threatens to take control of him by riding him as she would a horse.

In *The Woman’s Prize*, yet another woman defeats and “rides” a man. As early as Act II, Rowland acknowledges that Livia has defeated him:

I am ridden, Tranio,
And spur-galled to the life of patience
(Heaven keep my wits together!) by a thing
Our worst thoughts are too noble for: a woman. (II.iii.23-26)

Rowland continues the equestrian theme when he laments, “She has done me such disgrace, so spitefully, / So like a woman bent to my undoing, / That henceforth a good horse shall be my mistress” (II.iii.29-31). In the space of only nine lines, Rowland describes himself as both horse and rider. In the first passage, he acknowledges Livia’s supremacy, so she is the rider. However, in the second passage, Livia is no longer a conqueror, but rather an ill-tempered woman. Once again, a woman who asserts her power over a man is equated with a horse; Rowland is so disillusioned that he decides to replace Livia with a horse he can more easily control.

Disappointed lovers are not the only men to equate women and horses. When Livia asks her father for a blessing, he responds, “Yes, when I bless a jade that stumbles with me” (II.vi.126).

Rowland at least associates Livia with a valuable horse, but Petronius compares her to a worthless jade.

Rowland's fears of being ridden reflect another common equine association. Cuneo notes that "Sometimes...the reins of the bridle wind up in the wrong hands, and the bridle turns from a positive force of reason and restraint into an instrument of enslavement" (156-157). In a series of images of Phyllis seducing Aristotle, Phyllis is shown riding and holding the reins of a saddled and bridled Aristotle (Cuneo 157). Rowland, like Aristotle, falls victim to female equestrian control, and he resents his demotion from rider to horse.

The most frequent excuse for comparing women and horses is an accusation of promiscuity. In fact, it is this association that causes problems for Petruchio in his battle with Maria. Frustrated and confused, he says, "Were she a whore directly, or a scold, / An unthrift, or a woman made to hate me, / I had my wish, and knew which way to rein her" (IV.ii.14-16). Maria is obviously chaste, so Petruchio cannot describe her as a horse for being a whore. She is not a scold, so he cannot label her in that way, either. Petruchio is helpless in his fight against this unlabeled feminine force. He can neither figuratively bridle Maria as a horse nor physically bridle her as a scold, and without a bridle of any sort, he is unable to "rein her" or reign over her. Boose insightfully discusses the connections among whores, horses and bridles: "The underlying literary 'low culture' trope of unruly horse/unruly woman seems likely to have been the connection that led first to the metaphoric idea of bridling women's tongues and eventually to the literal social practice. Inside that connection, even the verbs 'reign' and 'rein' come together in a fortuitous pun that reinforces male dominance" (146). Karen Raber also notes a similar association of "good reigning with good reining" (230). Boose's analyses of equestrian language

is correct, but it does not mention that in cases like Petruchio's, the image can just as easily be flipped to depict female dominance and male helplessness.

After Maria proves her supremacy multiple times and Petruchio admits defeat, the two reconcile. However, Petruchio cannot resist adding one final image of equestrian control: "I have my colt again, and now she carries" (V.iv.88). This statement is a daring one coming from a man who has spent most of the play in a subordinate position. Here he affirms his status as the rider and puts Maria in the position of the young, inexperienced horse. This reassignment of roles also carries sexual undertones, especially considering the fact that Maria has refused to consummate their marriage until this point. Petruchio's statement in *The Woman's Prize* also echoes one of his remarks to Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*: "Women are made to bear, and so are you" (II.i.211). With both his wives, Petruchio attempts to affirm his powerful manly status by portraying himself as the rider and the wives as horses. In the case of Maria, however, his claim to superiority lacks credibility. Maria has thoroughly conquered him, and his comment is overshadowed by the epilogue promoting gender equality that directly follows it.

Each of these plays explores the idea of horses as metaphors for gendered power relations. That power can result from social prominence, sexual prowess, or a combination of the two. *Eastward Ho* presents a fairly standard association between whores and horses, and unruly women like Gertrude are punished, while Mildred is rewarded for bridling her desires and submitting to her father's will. In *The Roaring Girl*, Moll Cutpurse adjusts her equestrian rhetoric to portray herself as either horse or rider, and she floats between these roles as easily as she crosses gender barriers. In *The Woman's Prize*, the women truly reign—and rein. While the men crack the standard bawdy "riding" jokes, the women invert these images in practice. The

rhetoric of bridling unruly horses, rivers, passions, or women permeates these plays and provides the background for a discussion of both sexual and social power.

Conclusion

Equine imagery abounds in early modern texts. Whether in a polemical religious tract, an epic poem, or a bawdy city comedy, a reference to a horse adds color and character to the rhetoric or action. The significance of equine symbolism is not consistent, but it does tend to follow patterns. A reference to a horse, ass, or mule typically relates to social status, control, or sexuality. Of course, these categories frequently overlap. A beautiful, powerful horse can allow his rider to display both his high social status and his power to control his inferiors; in a different context, the same horse can be used to mock his rider's pride. Opposing Catholic and Protestant interpretations of the pope's equestrian displays are prime examples of this phenomenon. When someone chooses to ride an ass instead of a horse, his choice usually demonstrates his humility.

References to bridles and bits are generally related to control. The force the rider must control is frequently passion, but one must be careful not to assume that every horse and rider pair represents a dichotomy of passion and reason. Guyon and Brigadore are an important exception to this pattern. The relationship between horse and rider can also serve as a metaphor for gendered power struggle. Typically, whoever is referred to as the rider is higher up in the social hierarchy, but if the character described as the horse wrests control away from the rider, the hierarchy is inverted. The combination of horseplay and wordplay in these texts allows the authors to effectively meet their argumentative and narrative goals.

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